

# Label ensures goods from damage

The most important part of packaging materials might be the label.

An innovative label system — Shockwatch — incorporates an impact-sensitive glass vial. Normally clear, this vial turns tattletale red when a carton is dropped. Manufacturers as well as carriers are heralding the usefulness of this simple device.

The Shockwatch label is a 4-inch adhesive square that, in addition to displaying standard warning and "Handle with care" messages, has an embedded tiny glass tube. Surface tension keeps the exposed part of the tube clear, but a sufficient shock unleashes a hidden red fluid.

By varying the diameter of the little tube, Media Recovery is able to offer four different models of its Shockwatch label. Each reflects sensitivity to different drop heights: 6 inches, 1 foot, 2 feet or 3 feet. The weight of the overall package and the vulnerability of its contents determine which label

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to use.

As described by the company, here are some examples of how this label is saving shippers money:

■ **Unisys** was experiencing high customer complaints from

"head crash" problems on shipped disk drives. After adopting the Shockwatch damage alert program, these problems plummeted from 7,000 a year to just 1,000.

■ **NCR** used the system to identify poor handling zones. Computers shipped to England were consistently experiencing damage on some leg of the trip. The use of Shockwatch labels enabled the company to determine where it was occurring.

■ A furniture manufacturer reported almost a 70 percent reduc-

tion in shipping damage and has eliminated the need for expensive overpackaging of its goods.

Benefits are possible for carriers as well. Global Van Lines was reportedly the first major international carrier to use the labels extensively. It claimed an initial reduction of 40 percent in reported damages.

The cost of Shockwatch labels ranges from about \$2 each in quantities of 100 to 2,000 labels down to 85 cents each for quantities of 100,000. This is relatively inexpensive compared with the costs of replacing damaged goods.

The Packaging Council figures the average cost of repairing or replacing damaged goods at \$500 per item. A researcher at Pennsylvania State University reported the real cost of repairing or replacing a damaged product at seven times its list price.

So, if your company ships fragile products and has had problems with transit damage in the past, use of these labels could provide

you with the clout you need to enforce better handling of your products.

■ **The Bottom Line:** The Shockwatch label is essentially a handling modification system. But you'll need to discuss its importance with your carrier before getting started. Unless they're involved ahead of time, you might find that packages with the labels are refused for shipment.

With the carrier's cooperation, however, the labels may ensure that products built with no defects will be delivered to the customer with no defects. Using these shock-sensitive labels now gives more precise meaning to the word "fragile."

The Shockwatch label system is available from Media Recovery Inc., Dallas 75247; (800) 527-9497.

Hillel Segal's weekly column evaluates gadgets, small-computer hardware and software, seminars, and books designed to enhance business productivity.